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SUBJECT: GREEK CYPRIOT ENCLAVES IN THE NORTH: HANGING BY A
THREAD

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On December 14, political section staff joined United Nations civil affairs personnel on one of their weekly monitoring visits to the enclaved Greek Cypriot community on the Turkish Cypriot-administered Karpass peninsula. Embassy officers accompanied UNFICYP personnel on two home visits before observing the delivery of Christmas gifts to the Greek Cypriot school in the town of Rizokarpasso. While the 300-odd Greek Cypriots of Karpass continue to live in challenging conditions -- and face some difficulties in their relationship with the Turkish Cypriot authorities -- the opening of this school (the first Greek Cypriot secondary school to operate in the north since the 1974 war) has marked an important improvement in the lot of the enclaved. Although the fate of this aging, dwindling community is an open question, the continued support they receive from the GOC and the UN -- as well as the comparatively accommodating stance of the post-Denktash "TRNC" -- suggests that this community stands a better chance of long-term survival than at any time since 1974. END SUMMARY.

WHO ARE THE ENCLAVED?

¶2. (U) In the wake of the 1974 war, a large and comprehensive population transfer took place, with all but a small number of Turkish Cypriots moving north, and all but a few Greek Cypriots and Maronites fleeing to the Government of Cyprus-controlled south. Those who remained behind are commonly referred to as "enclaved." Their numbers have dwindled significantly over the past 30 years. Today, approximately 500 Turkish Cypriots remain in the south (mainly around Limassol), while approximately 300 Greek Cypriots and 150 Maronites live in the north. The Greek Cypriot enclaved are concentrated in three villages on the Karpass Peninsula at the northeastern tip of the island: Leonarisso (Ziyamet in Turkish), Agias Trias (Sipahi), and Rizokarpasso (Dipkarpaz).

¶3. (U) The enclaved in the north make up less than 0.2 per cent of the population of the "TRNC," but their political significance has always outweighed their numerical strength. During the 30-year reign of Turkish Cypriot strongman Rauf Denktash, the "TRNC" took a fairly aggressive stance toward the enclaved, denying them schooling, hampering their religious life, and making economic activity difficult. This policy of persistent harassment lead to the gradual shrinking of the enclaved populations in Karpass, as well as the outright disappearance of Greek Cypriot life from towns like Bellapais -- where an enclaved community that had held on for some years after 1974 eventually pulled up stakes and fled south. Those that remain today in Karpass are, with a few notable exceptions, elderly and completely reliant on the GOC for support. For its part, the GOC remains committed to the material and financial upkeep of enclaved Greek Cypriots, as a symbol that the division of the island is not an acceptable

or permanent state of affairs.

UN REACHES OUT

14. (U) Under the terms of the 1975 Vienna III Agreement, civil affairs officers from the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) monitor the condition of the enclaved in the north, facilitate medical care, deliver supplies money provided through the Red Cross by the GOC (pension payments and the like, usually in cash), and informally seek to resolve disputes involving the enclaved, their Turkish Cypriot neighbors, and "TRNC" officials. Accordingly, UNFICYP conducts regular weekly patrols to the Karpass region, visiting the designated Greek Cypriot spokespersons in each of the three villages and making informal home visits. UN convoys also visit the enclaved Maronites in the northwest every fortnight.

15. (U) To facilitate their monitoring and assistance activities, UN civilian police (CIVPOL) maintain a post in Leonarisso, normally manned by two officers (currently, one cop each from India and the Netherlands). On December 14, poloffs joined a small UNFICYP convoy, which called on this liaison post before setting off to visit Greek Cypriots in the three enclaved villages. The situation of the enclaved in each village is different, but each settlement nonetheless highlights some of the common challenges faced by all Greek Cypriots residing in the north.

HARD TIMES IN A SMALL TOWN

16. (SBU) Leonarisso, which is some 100 kilometers from Nicosia, is the site of both the UNFICYP liaison post and the

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smallest enclaved community. Of the 200-odd residents of the town, who are both Turkish Cypriots and Anatolian "settlers," only four are Greek Cypriot. (COMMENT: A local cop from the "political bureau" of the "TRNC" police -- whose job was apparently both to monitor the UN convoy and to relay their questions and requests back to Turkish Cypriot authorities -- joined the convoy in Leonarisso and stayed with us throughout the day. He was a visible, but fairly unobtrusive, presence, and seemed to have an easy rapport with the enclaved we visited. END COMMENT.) Even though the liaison post gave the impression that neither life nor work was too hectic for the UN in or around the village, it was quite clear from the convoy's home visit to Leonarisso enclaved spokesperson Panayiota Kananka that the seriousness of problems faced by the enclaved are in inverse proportion to the size of their community.

17. (SBU) Ms. Kananka, the youngest of the four elderly, frail and isolated Leonarisso enclaved, greeted the UN delegation in her small, drafty, mud-and-wood home (which had electricity but no indoor plumbing, and was filled with decades-old family photos, religious memorabilia, and the bed of her invalid mother who had died some months previously). She rattled off a series of complaints suggesting that life in the village was very difficult. Although some of her complaints would probably have been echoed by her poverty-stricken Turkish Cypriot neighbors, she also highlighted several problems that were clearly particular to the enclaved. Totally dependent on the Government of Cyprus for supplies and financial aid (and on the UN for delivery), Kananka reported that she had been the victim of theft several times; robbers had made off with a significant amount of assistance cash she had squirreled away in her cupboard, while "gypsies" had cut down some olive trees on a plot of land she worked for extra cash -- presumably making off with the logs for firewood. This, noted the "TRNC" cop, was a common complaint made by villagers from both communities.

18. (SBU) Although Kananka did make a somewhat cheerful remark

in Turkish that "Talat is OK!", it was clear that ethnically-tinged friction continued between her and the Turkish Cypriot authorities. She complained to the UN that the "government's" road upgrading scheme had not included the paving of a 40-meter lane leading to the Greek Cypriot cemetery outside of town. This prompted an indignant reply from the Turkish Cypriot cop, who claimed that this was the first he had heard of Kananka's complaint -- and who accused her of making a show by raising the issue with the UN before even approaching the local authorities with her request.

¶9. (SBU) Kananka also updated the UN on her continued dispute with the local mukhtar (village mayor) over the town's church. The church, which had been used for Muslim worship for years (a hand-made metal minaret top was still perched awkwardly on top of the steeple), was reopened for Orthodox prayer after a brand new mosque was built nearby four years ago. A dispute erupted, however, between Kananka and the village mukhtar over control of the keys to the building, and the authorities reportedly closed the church and began using it for agricultural storage in retaliation. Although the Talat administration has since cleaned the building, the mukhtar still holds the keys.

¶10. (SBU) According to CIVPOL, the UN has repeatedly intervened in the matter, and even gained assurances from "TRNC" officials in Nicosia that the keys would be handed over to Kananka. But local officials in the town claim that they have not been authorized "by the state" to surrender control of access to this "cultural heritage site," although they reportedly assure the UN that the enclaved may still have access to the church for prayer at any time. (UNFICYP personnel commented to us that the deadlock smacked of a personal war of wills between the tenacious Kananka and stubborn local authorities. Nonetheless, they felt her request to have custody of the keys was a reasonable one, and said they would continue to press for this. Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Samba Sane told us that UNFICYP might seek Embassy intervention with high-level "TRNC" officials if their efforts to resolve the dispute continue to be unsuccessful.)

BIGGER TOWN, (SOMEWHAT) BETTER LIFE

¶11. (SBU) The patrol then proceeded to the village of Agias Trias, which is some 20 or so kilometers past Leonarisso. The village consists primarily of mainland Turkish settlers (approximately 900, according to one UN estimate) but also hosts an enclaved community of 85 Greek Cypriots. The enclaved of Agias Trias are clearly in better shape than the beleaguered shut-ins of Leonarisso. A larger community, they

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are less isolated and have a more vibrant community life. The convoy called on spokesperson Savvas Liasi in his home. Mr. Liasi, a spry and gregarious man in his mid-80s, complained about his health (he had traveled to the south for medical treatment on several occasions) but said that, by and large, the situation in the village was "pretty much okay."

¶12. (U) Coincidentally visiting on the name day of the patron saint of a neighboring village, UN officials also spoke briefly with Father Zaharias, the Orthodox priest who has ministered to the enclaved (spending alternate weeks in Agias Trias and Rizokarpasso) since being allowed entry to the "TRNC" after the end of the Denktash regime. Zaharias conducts services in all three of the Karpass churches currently in operation (as well as at a fourth, which Turkish Cypriot authorities have not officially opened, but is nonetheless used in practice without special arrangement). Offering an almond-and-pomegranate dish made especially for the saint's day, Liasi and his wife recalled their as-yet-unanswered request that Turkish Cypriot officials allow the assignment of a second priest to take up some of the slack. The first candidate, who had been named by the

Government of Cyprus, withdrew from consideration "for personal reasons," while a second one was rejected by Turkish Cypriot authorities for making allegedly "nationalistic" comments.

¶13. (SBU) Although Liasi was visibly happier and more prosperous than Kananka (he joked with the Turkish Cypriot cop who accompanied the patrol and stressed to us that the villagers got on quite well with their neighbors, learning each other's languages and interacting freely) the Greek Cypriots of Agias Trias face the same demographic pressures that threaten the Leonarissa enclave. While more numerous, Agias Trias's villagers are still comparatively old, since nearly all of the town's children moved south long ago in search of education, jobs, and marriage prospects. The village's only wedding in recent memory had taken place a few months earlier, between a local woman in her sixties and a former resident (now living in the south) who was at least as old. Even if Turkish Cypriot authorities respond positively to the new husband's request for permission to reside in the village permanently (he can now visit on a "tourist visa" for 90 days at a time), it still seems likely that Greek Cypriot life in Agias Trias will slowly fade away as the residents die off.

RIZOKARPASSO: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

¶14. (U) The patrol's final stop was Rizokarpasso, home to the largest community of enclavees -- approximately 270 Greek Cypriots living among 2000 or so Turkish settlers in the Karpass peninsula's principal town. UNFICYP personnel visited the secondary school in the town and chatted with the headmaster and his staff, since the local spokesman for the enclave had gone south that day for medical treatment. They also delivered Christmas gifts for local primary school students, courtesy of the GOC.

¶15. (SBU) The enclave community of Rizokarpasso is relatively prosperous and far less isolated than the communities of Leonarissa and Agias Trias. Greek Cypriots there reportedly mingle freely with their settler neighbors, and enjoy reasonably good relations with local officials (who provide free clinic-style medical care and look the other way when the enclave regularly fail to pay their utility bills). According to the secondary school principal, there was also a modicum of economic activity (with some Greek Cypriots tending goats, growing olives, or operating the occasional restaurant and coffee shop), even though relying on transfer payments from the government was still the "easiest option" for most of the town's enclavees.

¶16. (SBU) There is also some embryonic political life in Rizokarpasso, with enclave Greek Cypriots seeking to elect their own mukhtar in ROC local elections December 17. The headmaster noted that the current Greek Cypriot mukhtar (as opposed to the Turkish Cypriot mayor who actually governed the town from the local city hall) lived in exile in the south, having been elected thanks to the support of Rizokarpasso refugees in the government-controlled areas. For the first time, however, a local man was standing for election. Rizokarpasso's enclavees were hoping he would win out over the exiled candidate, so that their municipal leader (and their main advocate with GOC authorities) would be "closer" to the enclave and their day-to-day concerns. (On December 17, the Larnaca-based mukhtar was reelected -- no doubt a disappointment for the enclavees still residing in the town.)

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¶17. (U) Key to Rizokarpasso's comparative vitality, however, were the children and their school -- the only educational institution serving Greek Cypriots in the north. According to school officials, the town's Greek Cypriot population fell from a high of over 3,000 in the 1974 to its current level of

270 thanks in large part to Turkish Cypriot authorities' refusal to allow the opening of a secondary school for the enclaved. Prior to 2005, when the Talat administration reversed years of Denktashian intransigence and gave permission for a secondary school, children regularly went south for any education beyond the primary level. They rarely returned.

¶18. (U) Although there were several months of disagreement and posturing between GOC and Turkish Cypriot officials (involving disputes over which "sovereign" entity should pay for the school, the content of textbooks, and the political proclivities of the teachers sent from the south to teach there), the headmaster told the UN patrol that the school was "now fully functioning, fully staffed, and fully equipped." Indeed, the teacher-to-student ratio at Rizokarpasso schools (to which 20 teachers commute from the south to work with 27 secondary students, 15 primary students, and 13 nursery school kids) compares favorably to that of the government-controlled areas. The facility appeared clean, modern, and well-equipped with computers, musical instruments, books, and so forth.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) Although New York has reportedly raised serious questions about the wisdom of continued UN support for the enclaved since the opening of the Green Line in 2003 (liability issues associated with the delivery of large cash payments from the government are a particular concern now that the enclaved have more regular access to banks), UNFICYP will likely insist on continuing to visit and provision the Greek Cypriots of Karpass. Access to Karpass was a hard-won concession, and UN officials tell us that they do not want to abdicate their patrolling rights in the area lest the political situation deteriorate in the future. Moreover, in the absence of direct and pragmatic contact between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot officials, the UN remains the only force that can advocate for the enclaved with the Turkish Cypriot authorities when something goes wrong -- as it inevitably does. UNFICYP's quiet presence is probably vital to the continued correct (if not cordial) relations between the enclaved and their Turkish Cypriot neighbors.

¶20. (SBU) For its part, the Government of Cyprus seems certain to continue its financial and logistical support of the enclaved, regardless of the cost. A commitment to the survival of Greek Cypriots caught "under occupation" is something on which no Greek Cypriot leader could politically afford to waiver. Furthermore, cutting support for supply runs (even unnecessary ones) would lend credence to the politically unacceptable idea that the division of the island has somehow become normal.

¶21. (SBU) It is an open question whether Greek Cypriot life in the Karpass can endure in the long run. For the elderly shut-ins of Leonarisso, the odds of survival past the next few years are pretty slim. If current trends continue, even the more vibrant pensioners of Agias Trias will also eventually dwindle away. Nonetheless, there is hope for the comparatively sizable and young population of Rizokarpasso, thanks to the continued support of the GOC and UN -- and to the quiet change in Turkish Cypriot attitude that came about when Talat replaced Denktash. Although low-level friction may continue (as it does over the church keys of Leonarisso), the current Turkish Cypriot administration has made -- and so far stuck to -- a strategic choice. Where Denktash actively sought to choke out the enclaved through outright harassment and subtle demographic pressure, the Talat administration (albeit after much haggling) has eased up, allowing the opening of a school and the assignment of a priest. This could open the door to a modest demographic and religious bounce-back for Greek Cypriots in Karpass. But, as Liaisi stressed when he took poloff aside and begged the USG to "keep working for a solution," a real renaissance of mixed-village harmony in Cyprus is unlikely absent a comprehensive political solution. END COMMENT.

